

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KIEV 001258

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#)

SUBJECT: UKRAINE ELECTION SNAPSHOT: REGIONS PARTY TAKES
CRIMEA AMID CRIES OF FOUL IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

(U) Sensitive but unclassified; please handle accordingly.
Not for Internet distribution.

1. (SBU) Summary: In an election in which the status of Russian language and ties with Russia figured heavily in the local political agenda, voters in Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea delivered the majority of their votes to Viktor Yanukovych's Party of Regions in voting for the national parliament (Verkhovna Rada) March 26. Polling station disorganization and faulty voter lists were evident in Crimea as elsewhere throughout Ukraine, but did not prevent election day from proceeding calmly. In the race for Crimean parliament, Regions, running together with a localized "Russian bloc" under a "For Yanukovych" banner, scored a 32-percent plurality. Crimean PM Burdychov, representing President Yushchenko's People's Union-Our Ukraine party, called for the Crimean parliament race to be annulled due to vote count irregularities and failure to distribute ballots for the Crimean rada at some polling stations likely to vote in favor of Our Ukraine. The race for Simferopol mayor was annulled due to last-minute deregistration machinations and will be rerun. The house of one of Crimea's leading journalists, Liliya Budzhurova, was subject to an arson attack March 1 after she published a Ministry of Interior list of hundreds of criminals and suspected criminals running for office in Crimea; a village administration head winner was the subject of a fatal assault March 29 in what may have been an election-related crime. End summary.

You've got that Russian feeling

2. (SBU) The run-up to election day in Crimea was dominated locally by efforts to place a Russian-language referendum on the ballot and nationally by concerns that hundreds of suspected or convicted criminals were running for seats in the Crimean Parliament and local councils. The Crimean Appellate Court and Central Election Commission put a stop to the Russian-language referendum effort, saying it had not complied with appropriate legal procedures..

3. (SBU) In March 25-26 visits to a dozen precincts in the region around Simferopol covered by District Election Commission (DEC) no. 1, we sensed a strong resonance for the pro-Russian, anti-West, anti-U.S., and anti-Ukrainian nationalist messages of the Crimean branches of Party of Regions, Vitrenko's People's Opposition, the Communists and the SDPU(o)-led Ne Tak bloc. The pro-Russian attitude of Regions' Crimean branch was even more pronounced than that of its headquarter, according to Crimean Tatar activist Nadir Bekir, as Regions competed against a greater array of Russophile political forces in Crimea. Yanukovych received 81 percent of the Crimean vote in the December 2004 presidential election re-vote.

4. (SBU) With 100 percent of Crimean precincts reporting the March 26 election results, Regions received 58 percent of Crimea's vote for the Verkhovna Rada. "We know they are SOBs, but they're our SOBs," one local polling station commission (PSC) member told us March 26. The main countervailing influences that we detected were Crimea's Tatars (who now form 13 percent of Crimea's population and have traditionally affiliated with Rukh, a component of the national Our Ukraine Bloc) and the Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT), whose populist message resonated among some younger people.

Crimean parliament - Crimean PM claims: We wuz robbed!

5. (U) The voting for Crimea's own 100-seat parliament (rada) was more dispersed. (Note: The Crimean Rada is separate from the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, a communal council which represents the interests of the Tatar population, is not a formal government institution, and is elected on a different cycle.) With 92% of precincts reporting by late March 29, the "For Yanukovych" electoral bloc, formed by the Crimean branch of Party of Regions and a local "Russian bloc" party, had received a plurality of 32.1%, followed by former Crimean PM Kunitsyn's bloc (8.4%), Rukh (6.9%, representing the Tatar vote), "Soyuz" (Union, advocating union with Russia 6.8%), BYuT (6.3%), Communists (5.8%), and Vitrenko (4.1%). Apparently failing to clear the three-percent threshold were Ne Tak! (2.7%), Lytvyn's bloc (2.4%), People's Union Our

Ukraine (1.4%), and the Socialists (1.0%).

16. (U) Crimean PM Anatoliy Burduhov, appointed in September 2005 and the top candidate on the Crimean parliament slate of People's Union Our Ukraine (PUOU), which ran separately from its fellow national Our Ukraine bloc component Rukh party in the Crimean elections, cried foul at a March 29 news conference. He blamed "considerable falsifications" for PUOU being shut out of the Crimean parliament, claiming that PUOU had recorded instances where votes cast for PUOU and the Socialists were "recorded as votes given to the For Yanukovich electoral bloc." On March 28, PUOU's Crimean branch called for the annulment of the elections to Crimea's parliament, claiming its observers had documented that voters had not been issued ballots for the Crimean parliamentary election at 14 different PSCs.

Despite disorganization, mainly calm election day

17. (SBU) Despite widespread fears nationally about problems with voter lists, long and complicated ballots, and shortages of PSC members, our visits to Simferopol precincts March 25 and on election day revealed generally well prepared commissions that had worked conscientiously to correct voter lists in the lead-up to election day. In precinct 132, for instance, 500 names had been added after an entire block had inadvertently been left out of the list issued in November 2005, increasing the precinct's total number of voters to just over 3,000. Voters at the precinct did at one point did have to wait 45 minutes to vote, but appeared tolerate the inconvenience.

18. (SBU) Somewhat surprisingly, we also did not observe any problems with computer-aided transliteration from Russian to Ukrainian of names on the voter lists, a problem constantly highlighted by spokespersons for Regions Party and for the independent NGO Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU). When we asked poll workers about the transliteration problem, most dismissed it, noting that when problems arose, they had authority under the law to authorize on-the-spot corrections. The local CVU representative and OSCE/ODIHR long-term observers (LTOs) did not identify any major concerns, emphasizing instead the dirty campaigning that had been conducted at the local level.

19. (SBU) One notable glitch occurred in the Simferopol mayoral race. Confusion over implementation of an 11th-hour court order to delete and/or reinstate a Simferopol mayoral candidate on the ballot led to uneven actions across Simferopol. As a result, the mayoral race for Simferopol was declared invalid and will have to be rerun.

Criminals, criminals, everywhere?

10. (SBU) Crimea attracted negative pre-election coverage regarding concerns about the potential criminalization of its local councils (where deputies' immunity was available) after Interior Minister Lutsenko announced in late February that over 100 candidates for the Crimean parliament were the subject of open criminal investigations, and that over 500 candidates for local councils were convicted criminals. After independent Simferopol-based journalist Liliya Budzhurova published the names of those fingered by Lutsenko in her Pervaya Krymska paper, her house was the subject of a middle-of-the-night arson attack March 1 (no one was injured, as the fire was fortunately quickly extinguished).

11. (SBU) Budzhurova told us March 2 that the situation in Crimea was as bad as it had been since the early 1990s, with criminals once again acting with impunity. Anatoliy Symonenko, the victorious candidate to head the Mirny village administration near Yevpatoria, died early March 30 after a brutal March 29 assault by two unidentified club-wielding individuals. Lutsenko, presidential chief of staff Rybachuk, and National Security and Defense Council Secretary Kinakh all spent time in Crimea in early March attempting to ensure the situation did not spin out of control and to make clear to Crimean authorities that Kiev was watching developments closely. March 30 press reports indicated that Lutsenko would personally supervise the criminal investigation into Symonenko's death.

12. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website at:
www.state.gov/p/eur/kiev.
Herbst